

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING AND THE SPECIAL CONSTABULARY: A REVIEW OF EMPLOYER POLICIES

A Report for The Police Foundation

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1. Introduction

Aims of the study

The research conducted for this study had three broad aims. The first of these was to examine the attitudes of large employers in the private sector to staff participation in voluntary work. Thus, the study was concerned with the various ways in which employers actively encourage employee volunteering, the extent to which employee volunteering is treated as an integral component of ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR), and the kinds of rationales for supporting voluntary work to which employers subscribe.

The second aim of the research was to look more specifically at whether employers have provisions for or actively encourage staff involvement in the Special Constabulary: that is, the voluntary section of the local police force. Hence the research looked at the extent to which volunteering for the Special Constabulary is included within wider voluntary work policies, is specified as a particular goal, or is not covered by such policies.

The third aim of the study built on the first and second: that is, the study has sought to use the research findings on volunteering to identify opportunities for the Special Constabulary to widen employer support for the organisation. By reviewing existing policies on employee volunteering, and attitudes of employers to the Special Constabulary, the intention was to consider ways in which employer support for the Special Constabulary might relate to other CSR goals, and to explore the scope for raising awareness of the Specials among both employers and employees.

Background

This study emerged out of three broad areas of concern:

- The increasing commitment of private sector employers to the principles of CSR, including employee volunteering;
- The high levels of interest among members of the general public in voluntary work, and the accompanying ministerial interest in further promoting volunteering and ‘active communities’; and,
- The desire of the Special Constabulary to extend participation in the organisation.

Corporate social responsibility

CSR is a broad term, which refers to the recognition by companies that they have responsibilities not only to their customers and staff but also to the wider communities in which they are based and even – given the increasingly global and interdependent nature of manufacturing, communications and trade – to the wider world.

The ways in which these responsibilities are defined can take many different forms. They may encompass, for example, concerns about the environmental impact of the company’s operations; desire to improve the education and welfare of current and (potential) future generations of employees and customers; a commitment to charitable work of all kinds –

whether relevant or not to the core activities of the company. According to the definition offered by the Department of Trade and Industry CSR Report of 2002, a responsible organisation is one which:

1. ... Recognises that its activities have a wider impact on the society in which it operates;
2. In response, ... takes account of the economic, social, environmental and human rights impact of its activities across the world; and
3. ... Seeks to achieve benefits by working in partnership with other groups and organisations (DTI, 2002: 7).

While the discussion and promotion of the principles of CSR has grown in intensity over the past decade or more, the very idea of CSR should not be regarded as an entirely recent phenomenon. As noted by Tuffrey (1999), it has been traditional for companies to make a contribution to local communities and wider society beyond that of providing (at a price) goods and services, creating employment, and paying tax: '...whether it was the model villages of the early industrialists or the public endowments of Victorian philanthropists, there has always been a mixture of motivations between altruism and self-interest'.

Despite the growing emphasis placed upon CSR by companies and also by Government over recent years, a mixed picture emerges from efforts to assess the extent of corporate giving. The Guardian Newspaper's survey of corporate giving in 2002 indicates that the percentage of pre-tax profits that are contributed to the community remain much the same today as they were a decade ago, notwithstanding the many initiatives that have been developed to encourage CSR (Benjamin, 2002). Currently, there is much debate about the most appropriate methods of measuring the levels, kinds and impacts of corporate giving, which can take many non-monetary as well as monetary forms. The London Benchmarking Group, for example, has developed techniques to assist companies to assess their involvement in the community.

Whatever the recent trends in approaches to corporate giving, the motivations for contributing (and being seen to contribute) to society remain compelling within the business world. Tuffrey (1999) notes that these motivations include:

- A sense of moral and social responsibility, also responding to expectations from society;
- A belief that companies have a long-term interest in fostering a healthy community, sometimes known as enlightened self-interest;
- The knowledge that community interventions involving employees, customers and suppliers can have direct benefits through increased profitability, stronger morale and improved customer loyalty.

These motivations apply not only to CSR as a whole, but also to employee volunteering, which is one specific aspect of CSR – and an aspect that has come to increasing prominence over the past few years. As observed by Lukka (2000: 3), in her literature review of employee volunteering, '...the traditional relationship of financial donations from the corporate to the community is now being extended to include time and resources, illustrated through many innovative volunteering partnerships, currently in practice in the UK.' Indeed, employee volunteering has been described as '...the fastest growing form of corporate community support' (Hill, 2002). The National Centre for Volunteering reports that the organisation Business in the Community held its first campaign to promote employee volunteering in

1990; and, by 2002, 74% of FTSE 100 companies had some kind of volunteering programme in place.¹

Employee volunteering refers to the involvement in voluntary work of employees with the active support of their employers. It can be either **employee-led** or **employer-initiated** involvement (Lukka, 2000). The volunteering itself can take many different forms. The employee volunteering website Cecile² points out that opportunities for employee involvement in the community can include not only regular or occasional contributions of time and skills to charitable organisations, but also:

- **Team challenge** events where a group of employees tackle a community problem or task together, while building team-working skills;
- **Development assignments** with a double objective: to complete a real project in a charity, and develop the employee's individual skills;
- **Secondments for transition** at times of major career change or in preparation for retirement, with a community organisation;
- **Mentoring**: a one-to-one basis for involvement, for all sectors in the community, particular popular in education;
- **Business on board**: volunteers serve as trustees on the management committees of community organisations.

Examples of the ways in which employers can support or promote voluntary work, the kinds and areas of voluntary work that may be favoured by employers, and some of the specific rationales for employee volunteering, will be discussed, in the 'Findings' section of this report.

Voluntary work

The interest in employee volunteering has emerged in a context of widespread commitment to voluntary work in general across the UK. The 2001 Citizenship Survey carried out by the Home Office looked at, among other matters, the extent to which people participate in communities. The report on the survey notes that this participation ranges from the relatively low-level, such as membership of a local social club, to the very active, such as the organisation of after-school activities or a Neighbourhood Watch group. In terms of formal volunteering – that is, providing unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations, the survey found that 39% of people had volunteered formally at least once over the past 12 months; and 26% had volunteered formally at least once a month (Prime *et al.*, 2002).

The tasks that were most likely to have been carried out by volunteers were the following:

- Raising and handling money (22%)
- Organising or helping to run an activity or event (21%)
- Giving other practical help (14%)
- Being a leader or a member of a committee (13%)
- Giving advice, information or counselling (11%)
- Providing transport or driving (10%)

¹ www.employeevolunteering.org.uk

² (Coordinating Employee Community Involvement Links Europe) www.cecile.net

Voluntary work was most likely to have been carried out in the following fields:

- Sports and exercise (13%)
- Children's education/schools (12%)
- Hobbies/recreation/arts/social clubs (10%)
- Religion (9%)
- Youth/children's activities outside school (7%).

The survey also found that 4% of people – and 7% of those in employment - volunteered through employer-supported volunteering schemes.

The Home Office has sought to promote voluntary work through the Active Community initiative. Voluntary work, according to the Home Office, helps to create 'active communities [which are] strong, safe, inclusive and welcoming', and in which '...local people have opportunities to realise their potential, gaining experience, education and life skills, as well as influencing the social, political and economic context of their lives'.³

Home Secretary David Blunkett (Home Office, 2002a) has emphasised the particular role that employers can play in encouraging their staff to undertake voluntary work and, through this, to become 'active citizens'. In a speech to the Confederation of British Industry in May 2002, Blunkett stated that employers should work with the government in developing new ways of supporting volunteering, and argued that 'building a safer society based on strong communities is in the interests of business as well as Government'. He drew special attention to the importance of encouraging employees to participate in the Special Constabulary, which can help to cut crime and promote community safety.

A range of volunteering websites have been developed which promote voluntary work of all kinds. These websites include, for example, do-it.org.uk, which provides advice on volunteering opportunities, and on undertaking volunteering while working, unemployed or studying. According to the website, volunteering is 'a great way to develop new skills, build your confidence, and show future employers you've got drive and initiative'. Recent years have also seen the emergence of a number of volunteering 'brokers' – such as the well-established Business in the Community - which build contacts between businesses and voluntary organisations, and help to organise volunteering opportunities.

The Special Constabulary

The Special Constabulary is made up of volunteers who carry out certain police duties for a few hours (usually around four) each week. Specials have the same powers as a regular constable; however their jurisdiction is limited to the police region they are based in. Their duties typically include carrying out patrols, and helping to police special events such as sporting occasions. In addition to their policing work, they are expected to attend training sessions, where appropriate.

³ Lord Filkin (2002) 'Home Office support for employee volunteering', www.employeevolunteering.org.uk/about/lordfilkin

According to Gaston and Alexander (2001), Special Constables have worked alongside full-time police officers since the time the first professional police forces came into existence in the early nineteenth century. They were initially regarded as reserve officers who could be called upon at times of emergency. Over time, they came to be seen as ‘active as ordinary citizens in helping the police in their neighbourhoods’ (1967 Home Office publication, cited in Gaston and Alexander, 2001). The numbers of Special Constables peaked at over 67,000 in the 1950s, but subsequently declined to about 43,000 over the next decade and to about 16,000 by the late 1980s. The past few years have seen a further substantial drop in numbers: from around 19,000 in 1997 to about 11,500 today, according to Home Office figures.

Concern about this decline in numbers led to Home Office Minister John Denham’s announcement in 2002 of various measures to boost recruitment and retention (Weir, 2002). These include the provision of funds of £300,000 to support police forces that are deemed to be ‘Specials Champions’, thanks to their commitment to the recruitment and deployment of Specials.⁴ Most recently, an announcement was made in the House of Lords of the Government’s intention to amend Special Constable regulations to allow Specials to be paid for their services (Guardian, 2002).⁵

These current initiatives aimed at extending participation in the Special Constabulary are, in fact, a continuation of earlier efforts on the part of the Home Office. In 1995, the Home Office established a working group with the specific remit of reviewing the Special Constabulary. The 1996 report of the working group highlighted, among other issues, the fact that employer support for Special Constables can play a crucial part in their recruitment and retention (Home Office, 1996). The report thus recommended that research should be carried out in order to look at how forces could attract support for the Special Constabulary among employers. As a result, a project on employer support was subsequently undertaken by Davis Smith and Rankin (1999).

Davis Smith and Rankin’s project entailed the design and piloting of a model for employer-supported volunteering, according to which specialist internal and external brokers were used to make contact with employers and to explore ways in which the employers might support employees interested in becoming Special Constables. By these means, the four police forces involved in the pilot established good relationships with more than 50 employers. However, the results of this work were somewhat disappointing in that only a very small number of applications to the Special Constabulary resulted from these relationships.

Notwithstanding these disappointing results, the work carried out by Davis Smith and Rankin highlighted a number of important issues which are relevant to employer support for the Special Constabulary, and hence have a direct bearing on this current study. For example, as part of the research a survey of special constables was carried out in the four forces involved in the pilot. Key findings of the survey included:

- 70% of respondents reported that their employers took a favourable or very favourable view of their work as Specials.

⁴ For example, Norfolk Constabulary is among the Champion Forces, and has launched an initiative entitled STEP (Specials Through Employer Partnership) to encourage partnerships between Norfolk employers, employees and the police to increase the number of Special Constables in the county. As part of this initiative, good practice guidance on promoting employer support for specials is currently being produced.

⁵ Announcement made on 5 December 2002 by Home Office Minister Lord Bassam.

- When asked how employers could support employees who are Specials, the respondents suggested: by being flexible over time off (40% of responses); taking participation in the Specials into account in staff appraisals (27%); and providing opportunities for publicity about the Special Constabulary (20%).

Over the course of Davis Smith and Rankin's project, contact was made with a large number of both public and private sector employers, and it was found that 'there seemed to be a substantial reservoir of goodwill and support towards the police and the Special Constabulary' (1999: 21).

While Davis Smith and Rankin's research looked specifically at employer support for Special Constables, this study has a broader focus, in that it has looked at employer support for volunteering more generally. As such, it has sought to develop ideas about how the Special Constabulary may widen its support among employers by considering not only issues pertaining to the Specials, but, more widely, the ways in which employers promote volunteering of all kinds, and the advantages they associate with volunteering.

However, in focusing on employer support for voluntary work in general and Special Constables in particular, it is important to keep in mind that the part played by employers is bound to be only one of many factors that can facilitate or inhibit employee participation in the Special Constabulary. Research by Gaston and Alexander (2001) explored the range of motivations and experiences of Special Constables. Gaston and Alexander's survey of former Special Constables found that the most frequent reasons given for resigning from the Constabulary were:

- Work or study commitments (22%);
- To join the regular force (19%);
- Domestic reasons (15%).

Gaston and Alexander also asked both former and serving Special Constables to choose from a list of 19 options the three main factors that made them resign or would be likely to do so. After the above three reasons, the other factors that were most frequently cited related to the conditions and nature of work within the Special Constabulary itself - namely:

- Poor supervision by Special supervisors;
- Lack of training;
- Not feeling valued;
- Uninteresting duties;
- Not being deployed in a worthwhile manner.

Methods

The research reported upon here was of a qualitative and exploratory nature. That is, it did not attempt to quantify the range of employer approaches to staff volunteering. Rather, the study investigated the detail of a number of different volunteering policies and schemes, in order to produce a broad classification of differing approaches, and to gain insight into the variety of ways in which the benefits of volunteering are conceived.

For the review of volunteering policies and schemes, 50 companies from the FTSE top 100 list were selected. The FTSE 100 index was used as a source of employers because the study focused on large employers only. The selection of 50 companies was carried out in such a way as to ensure that all major business sectors were represented. The researchers then contacted the head office of each of the 50 companies to discuss, with the relevant departments, the provisions (if any) made for employees interested in volunteering. If no contact was made by telephone then companies were reached by e-mail or post. The researchers requested company documentation on volunteering, and gained further information by visiting the companies' websites. Hence the main sources of information acquired for the study were the following:

- Telephone interviews about employee volunteering with officers from personnel, public relations, and CSR/community investment departments. Each interview covered questions such as whether any formal policies and schemes were in place; provisions made for volunteering in company time; the areas of voluntary work supported by the company; rationales for promoting employee volunteering; and whether or not participation in the Special Constabulary was supported. If no telephone contact was possible then e-mail or postal correspondence was used.
- Reviews of company documentation on employee volunteering in the form of internal policy documents and intranet sources of help and support for employees interested in voluntary work
- Reviews of company publicity on volunteering and, more broadly, CSR – derived from company websites and brochures.

Inevitably, the study had a number of limitations, because of the time constraints within which it was carried out. Most notably, it focused on the ways in which volunteering policies and schemes were developed and understood by the head offices of companies, rather than on the experiences of implementing such policies 'on the ground'. Hence it was not possible to explore the ways in which volunteers themselves felt about the support (or lack of it) they received from their employers - or how managers responded to employees' involvement in voluntary work. Another limitation was that the research looked solely at large companies, and so did not investigate the particular pressures that small organisations may face when employees seek support for voluntary activities.⁶ Likewise, employee volunteering in the public sector was not examined.

⁶ See the section on SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) Research on the employee volunteering website www.employeevolunteering.org.uk.

2. Findings

This section of the report discusses the findings of the review of company approaches to employee volunteering. Much of the discussion here relates to employee volunteering in the broadest sense. This then informs a more specific consideration of volunteering as it relates to the Special Constabulary. The concluding section of the report, which follows this chapter, builds on the findings discussed here by identifying opportunities for the Special Constabulary to promote employer support for the organisation.

There are four parts to this discussion:

- An examination of the extent to which companies have policies on volunteering and the nature of these policies;
- A review of the areas of voluntary work that are prioritised by companies;
- Consideration of the advantages associated with employee volunteering; and
- Discussion of company support for employee participation in the Special Constabulary.

Employer policies on employee volunteering

From the evidence collected, a classification of the type and content of volunteering policies was constructed. In no cases is volunteering discouraged by employers. Company approaches range from formal policies including paid leave for voluntary work, to a few companies that, while not actively encouraging staff to volunteer, do take a flexible approach to the subject.

The classification of company approaches to volunteering is as follows:

- Formal policy on paid leave for voluntary work;
- Volunteering allowed in company time, but no formal policy on paid leave;
- The company promotes volunteering, but done in the employees own time; and
- There is no active support, but left to the line-managers' discretion.

A number of the employers contacted for this study are parent companies to groups of smaller operating companies. In some of these cases, details of volunteering policies are available as decisions are made centrally. However, three out of the 50 companies do not have such group-wide policies, instead devolving policy decisions to each operating company. In the example of Associated British Foods (ABF), this company does not have central volunteering policies. Local policies are informed by overall CSR guidelines produced by ABF, but these are general and do not deal specifically with volunteering.

The number of companies which fall under each of the above categories of volunteering approaches is shown in Table 1. It should be noted that of the fifty companies contacted, in seven cases no specific information on volunteering was forthcoming, or was available on company websites. These cases are therefore excluded from the table.

Table 1. Company policies on employee volunteering

Policy	No.	%
Formal policy on paid leave for voluntary work	16	40
Volunteering allowed in company time, but no formal policy	11	27.5
Promote volunteering, but preferably in the employees own time	6	15
There is no active support, but left to the line-managers' discretion	7	17.5
<i>The company would not encourage involvement</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
Total	40	100
Policies are devolved to smaller companies	3	

As Table 1 demonstrates, of those companies where approaches to volunteering are available centrally, two-thirds (27 out of 40) authorise employees to volunteer during company time. The remaining third allow volunteering, although this is either outside of work time (six companies), or at a manager's discretion (seven companies). None of the companies said they would not encourage involvement.

Formal policy of paid leave for voluntary work

Over three-quarters (33 out of 40) of the companies studied, to some degree, actively encourage employees to participate in voluntary work. At their most generous, employers allow staff to take a specified amount of paid time away from work to carry out voluntary duties. For example, British Airways have a formal volunteering policy which authorises up to one week per annum paid leave for public duties, including those of the volunteer reserve forces. In addition, employees do a range of other kinds of voluntary work for various charities and other organisations. However, this is not covered by the company policy and, how much paid leave is allowed, is at the manager's discretion.

An example where paid leave is available for both public duties and other more general forms of volunteering is Abbey National. According to their Community Affairs Department, Abbey National was the first company in the UK to implement a formal volunteering policy. Paid leave is available for those on public duties, such as magistrates, local authority councillors and those on jury service. The policy also specifically mentions Police Specials who, like those who are part of the volunteer reserve forces, are allowed up to one week paid leave per year (company approaches to the Special Constabulary will be discussed further below). Similarly, for those involved in other voluntary organisations, Abbey National generously allows one week paid leave. The one week of paid leave can be claimed through what is known as a 'Match Time' scheme. Here staff can claim up to 35 hours of paid work per year to match their own time commitment to voluntary work in the organisation of their choice. Abbey National provide a searchable online database of volunteering organisations to help staff choose which organisation they are most interested in. The full details of this policy are shown in Example 1.

Example 1. Abbey National volunteering policy

Abbey National Community Partnership

- A 'Match Time' scheme whereby staff can claim up to 35 hours (ie. one week) of paid work per year to match their own time commitment to voluntary work in the organisation of their choice (a searchable online database of volunteering organisations is provided)
- A pre-retirement programme which gives staff half their working week as paid work time, each week for the last three months leading up to their planned retirement date
- A scheme where employees can adopt personal objectives for community activities as part of their normal performance agreements

Policy for time off for public duties

- The company's usual practise is to provide paid leave for the duties of: a Justice of the Peace; a member of a local authority or any statutory tribunal; or a member of the managing or governing body of an educational establishment in England or Wales, maintained by a local authority
- Paid leave is provided for employees on jury service, or if they are required to attend a court or tribunal as a witness
- The company will allow up to one week's paid leave per year to attend required training, subject to work requirements, for employees in the volunteer reserve forces
- 'Members of staff who are special constables are permitted one week's paid leave per annum to attend the required training and court attendance. Any additional time must be taken as annual leave or in exceptional circumstances as unpaid leave.'

Sources: Interview with Abbey National Community Affairs Department officer; Abbey National's Volunteering Policy Statement; and www.employeevolunteering.org.uk/casestudies/abbeynational

It is worth noting that formal policies of the kind used by Abbey National are, for the most part, still in their infancy. While levels of staff volunteering are increasing, they are still low. During 2000, a total of 362 hours of 'Matched Time' was claimed by just 21 employees of Abbey National. During 2001, this had increased to 94 employees pledging over 16,500 hours to volunteering.⁷

Some companies specify which voluntary organisations they will authorise employees to have paid leave for. One way that Marks and Spencer do this is through part-time secondments. The company is also involved in the national 'Cares' scheme⁸ where teams of volunteers take part in voluntary 'action days'.

BAE Systems has a formal list of approved activities as part of its volunteering policy. The company approved its latest volunteering policy in March 2002 with the aim to '...promote the facility for employees to take leave to support certain community, parliamentary, national activities or to attend to certain personal circumstances.' Minimum standards of paid leave and eligibility criteria are provided for each of these activities, the full breakdown of which is shown in Example 2.

⁷ www.employeevolunteering.org.uk/casestudies/abbeynational

⁸ The national 'Cares' programme is managed by 'Business in the Community' (BITC)

Example 2. BAE Systems Approved Policy - March 2002

Community	Parliament /National Assembly	National	Personal
Civic duties (including local councils)	Parliamentary/National Assembly candidates	HM Reserve Forces	Bereavement leave
Magistrates	Members of Parliament /National Assembly	Territorial Army	Compassionate leave
Jury Service		Sporting activities	Medical appointments
Witness Service			Examination leave
School Governors			Graduation leave
Special Constables			Study leave
Voluntary Rescue Bodies			

Source: BAE Systems (2002) 'Approved Policy on Special Paid Leave', Issue 1, Effective March 2002.

As with the Abbey National example, the Special Constabulary is specifically mentioned in the policy. For such 'community activities', approved applications are limited to a maximum of fifteen days per annum of 'Special Paid Leave'. Special Paid Leave over this limit will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. For Voluntary Reserve Forces there is a lower limit of ten days, with any additional to be matched by annual leave. In other words, one day Special Paid Leave will have to be matched by one day annual leave.

Policies for volunteering during work time can be restricted to a range of approved voluntary schemes, such as the earlier Marks and Spencer and BAE Systems examples. Volunteering during work hours is usually also limited in terms of hours available. Of the fifty companies studied, the most generous was The Royal Bank of Scotland which allows for 20 days paid leave per year for public duty volunteering. More common is five to ten days per annum.

Time away from work may have to be matched by an employee's commitment to volunteering during their own time. Abbey National refer to this arrangement as 'Matched Time'. Barclays run a similar scheme and during 2000 the company started a new 'Hour for Hour' programme for staff involved in voluntary work. The company will match up to two hours of time committed personally with two hours of working time per month. Other companies provide flexible working arrangements to allow for voluntary work.

Volunteering in company time – no formal policy on paid leave

Companies that allow volunteering during work hours, but do not have a formal policy on paid leave, can be divided into two groups. Firstly, there are those that actively encourage volunteering, both for approved schemes and for other activities suggested by the employee. Four of the companies studied fitted this description. An example is Prudential which has a list of approved programmes that are run at a local level. Other volunteering activity is also possible. While the company accepts that most voluntary work will occur outside of work hours, it is possible for employees to make arrangements with their line-managers if they are going to do voluntary work in company time.

The second group allowed volunteering during company time, but only in specified schemes. There are seven companies that fall into this group. An example here is United Utilities where volunteering during work time is only possible if it is done as part of 'skills development', as arranged with the employee's line-manager; and preferably if it is with one of the company's 'community partner' organisations. Flexible working arrangements are possible for employees who volunteer. The details of these guidelines are shown in Example 3.

Example 3. United Utilities Employee Volunteering Guidelines

'United Utilities is committed to developing and empowering its employees. We recognise that a positive workforce is a productive workforce and that many of our employees enjoy taking part in community based activities, or being involved in fundraising activities within the community. United Utilities will facilitate and encourage employees to volunteer in the community under the following circumstance:

- Through volunteering during lunch hours, by offering flexible lunch hours, extended where needed
- Through volunteering out of working hours, by offering flexible working hours where possible (e.g. early finishing times)

'An employee wishing to carry out some form of volunteering during working hours must ensure that they are volunteering in accordance with the [following] criteria...

'While United Utilities does not support 'volunteering' during working hours, there are opportunities for employees to utilise working with a community group, or charity to help develop skills agreed with line managers. This should be viewed as an alternative to attending a training course or having some other work related skills development event.

'United Utilities encourage employees to take up volunteering opportunities with organisations that are currently considered as Community Partners of United Utilities.'

Source: United Utilities intra-net, 2002.

Another company that allows volunteering during company time, but only in specified schemes, is Royal and Sun Alliance (RSA). A CSR Consultant based at the company's Marketing Department commented that, while RSA does not have a specific policy on volunteering, it has a series of agreements with partnership organisations, many of which are involved in volunteering. One example is the Red Cross/Red Crescent. One of the objectives of the company's partnership with this organisation is to increase the number of volunteers provided by RSA.

Although these companies do not have a formal policy of paid leave for voluntary work, their involvement with the voluntary sector is still strong. Companies, such as United Utilities, take a flexible approach to working hours which could suit an employee considering joining the Police Specials. For this to be possible, the Specials should be added to a company's list of approved community partners.

Promote volunteering, but done in employees' own time

Some companies, while actively supporting employee volunteering, will only allow this outside of work hours. Any voluntary work carried out during the company's time will thus usually have to be taken out of the employee's annual leave entitlement, or during lunch hours. Of the 50 companies studied, six are in this group. An example of such a company is the Alliance and Leicester Group. This has links with 'partnership' community groups through BITC and Cares Incorporated. Staff are encouraged to volunteer for these partners, but preferably in their own time. Alliance and Leicester's volunteering policy is outlined in Example 4.

Example 4. Alliance and Leicester volunteering policy statement

'The Alliance and Leicester Group aims to act as a socially responsible employer and an influence for good in the communities in which we operate. We will support and involve staff of the Alliance and Leicester Group in community related projects which contribute towards staff development needs and provide measurable benefit to the communities where we conduct out business.

'The group will encourage volunteering in the community in which the group operates, linking with organisations that promote "partnerships" between businesses and the community (e.g. Business in the Community and Cares Incorporated). Whilst volunteering has the overall objective of promoting general corporate social responsibility objectives in the community, each year the group will devote its primary focus to a particular area of community activity e.g. education, the environment, crime prevention.

'Volunteering is to be undertaken in an employee's own time although the Group will adopt a flexible and responsible approach consistent with encouraging volunteering whilst safeguarding the business interests of the Group.

'The Group will match funds raised by employees for approved volunteering initiatives. ...For Alliance and Leicester employees, insurance cover is provided ...in respect of all agreed volunteering activities.'

Source: Alliance and Leicester internal policy document (2002)

Just because some companies do not allow volunteering during work time does not make them any less supportive. It should be remembered that the primary objective of any large corporation, as outlined in the above example, is bound to be '...safeguarding the business interests of the group'. Any kind of request for flexibility has to be seen in this context. Alliance and Leicester may not allow volunteering during company time, but will match funds raised by employees for approved schemes. Similarly, Exel do not permit volunteering during work hours. However, the company has its own foundation which provides donations to organisations for which Exel employees do voluntary work in their own time.

No active support – up to line managers' discretion

Some companies provide no active support for volunteering. Instead, any request from an employee is left to his/her line-manager's discretion. There are seven companies that match this description. For example, while Allied Domecq has a flexible working policy, this does not make any specific mention of volunteering. It is, rather, more concerned with issues of 'work-life balance'. When an officer from the company's Human Resources department was interviewed she said the company expects employees to manage their time themselves. If someone wanted to use this flexibility in order to carry out voluntary work then this would have to be cleared with their line-manager.

A second example is Legal and General. Their CSR Manager said that requests for time to do voluntary work are evaluated by line-managers on an individual basis. Each line-manager has to see if the voluntary work can be fitted around the work schedule. The company is generally flexible and someone may be permitted to leave work early to do voluntary work, and would not necessarily have to make up time.

While these companies do not actively support employee volunteering, they may still place a strong emphasis on other CSR goals. Such companies may, for example, focus on charitable giving. Furthermore, they may allow employees sufficient flexibility to make volunteering possible.

Areas of voluntary work preferred

Some of the companies that actively support employee volunteering have priority areas of voluntary activity; others, in contrast, support volunteering of all kinds.

Public service

In many cases – particularly among those companies which have formal volunteering policies, such as some of those cited above – a distinction is made between volunteering as part of a 'public service' or 'civic duties' and other forms of volunteering.

The kinds of activities that are typically described as 'public service' or 'civic duties' in volunteering policies include work as a magistrate or school governor, and participation in the reserve forces or St John's Ambulance. Again as evident from examples provided above, participation in the Special Constabulary is sometimes explicitly covered by the 'public service' element of volunteering policies; however, this kind of volunteering may alternatively fall under the category of community-based work.

Community-based activities

Many companies provide for voluntary work which falls under a loose heading of 'community-based activities'. From the sample of companies contacted for this study, the main community-related priorities which emerged in volunteering schemes and policies are the following:

- Education/youth
- General community benefit (e.g. providing practical assistance to local charities and services)
- Small business support
- Health
- Community safety.

Of the above areas, education/youth was most frequently emphasised. As is made explicit in some policies, but is implicit in others, work relating to education/youth is viewed as particularly important, given that the welfare of young people is so often deemed critical to the general health of a neighbourhood. Moreover, many companies are acutely aware that their own success in the future will partly depend on the existence of a well-educated potential workforce.

Examples of the kinds of voluntary work carried out in the area of education/youth include participation in reading schemes in schools (see Example 5) and involvement in local youth groups or sports teams. Another area of support is in different mentoring schemes, either of pupils or of teaching staff. J Sainsbury plc are involved in a local project where the head teachers of nine schools have mentoring support from board members under a 'Partners in Leadership' scheme.⁹ It is noted above that work as a school governor is covered in some of the formal policies on 'public service'.

Example 5. Bradford and Bingley Better Reading Partnership

'A partnership between Crossflatts Primary School and Bradford and Bingley, to provide volunteers who spend time on a one-to-one basis with children between the ages of six and ten listening to them read. It is designed to help boost literacy levels.

'... Volunteers spend 15 minutes a time, three times a week, with a child over a ten-week period. Under our scheme volunteers work with three children.

'.... Better Reading Partnership forms part of Bradford and Bingley's Community Investment Programme, and as such has the support of the company ... You should be given time to do this in working hours, subject of course to business conditions i.e. staff shortages, work volumes etc.'

Source: Bradford and Bingley internal document.

Environmental work

In addition to public service and community-based voluntary work, many companies stressed volunteering with environmental groups. This kind of volunteering often had an international dimension. For example, Royal and Sun Alliance are in partnership with the environmental group Earthwatch. Under this scheme, 20 employees each year are attached to a scientific research project overseas for a two-week period, which is taken out of paid work time.

⁹ www.employeevolunteering.org.uk/casestudies/jsainsbury.

The range of volunteering activities

Some companies prioritise areas of volunteering that are linked to their own work or sector of industry. For example, petrochemical companies may see it as part of their 'corporate social responsibility' to emphasise involvement with environmental groups. Similarly, the quarrying company Hanson is involved in various environmental projects, in recognition of the impact it has on the landscape and on particular neighbourhoods. Scottish Power also supports local environmental projects. In contrast, health is an area of concern for the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline. Employees from this company have been involved in various international and local health promotion schemes. Another example of how voluntary work can be linked to business activities is provided by Lloyds TSB, some employees of which act as treasurers for local charities, or help with auditing their accounts.

Certain companies combine support for volunteering in business-related areas with support for other kinds of volunteering. An example is HSBC which provides help for small businesses through a mentoring programme as well as being involved in schools reading schemes and in environmental volunteering projects.

The wide range of activities supported by some companies is striking. Severn Trent, for example, has involvement in projects that encompass educational, environmental and social goals. A typical social project supported by Severn Trent staff is The Haven Housing Trust in Nottingham.¹⁰ This charity provides accommodation for the elderly and disabled. Staff from Severn Trent have assisted in a fire safety upgrade for all its properties.

Abbey National and Cadbury Schweppes, among others, support employee volunteering by providing a 'menu' of opportunities on their staff intranet. Organisations seeking voluntary workers can approach the companies to have their details added to the list.

Advantages associated with employee volunteering

The companies contacted for this study put forward a variety of rationales for their support for employee volunteering.

General CSR benefits

For many of the companies, employee volunteering is viewed as an integral part of their wider CSR programmes. From this perspective, volunteering fits with a general emphasis on the importance of contributing to the 'communities' – whether these are defined as local, national or international – from which they derive their business.

This viewpoint is expressed in the following quotation from Shell's 2002 annual report:

Wherever we work we are part of a local community. We will constantly look for appropriate ways to contribute to the general wellbeing of the community and the broader societies who grant our licence to operate. (Shell, 2002, *People, planet and profits - The Shell Report*)¹¹

¹⁰ Severn Trent (2002) *Step>forward newsletter*. Summer 2002. Available from www.severntrent.co.uk.

¹¹ Available from www.shell.com.

It is recognised that it is in a company's interest to invest in the community as, without it, the company would have no business. This is seen as a two way process which is mutually beneficial, as is further illustrated by the following quotation from Scottish Power's community report for 2001/2002:

Scottish Power's business leadership and partnership model enables us to select and support community programmes through long-term investment plans, focusing on areas where we can add value and simultaneously derive benefits for our business. (Scottish Power, 2002, *Getting everyone involved – Scottish Power community report 2001/2002*)¹²

Specific benefits

Related to the broader concerns of CSR, many companies stress a range of more specific benefits associated with employee volunteering, including the following:

- Improving employees' skill levels;
- Enhancing employee motivation;
- Raising the profile of the business in the local community;
- Enhancing the company's wider reputation through the publicity generated; and
- Helping to create a more educated future workforce.

Of the above benefits, the one that was given the strongest emphasis over the course of this study was the impact of volunteering on employees' skills and general competence. For example, Lloyds TSB is currently in the process of mapping voluntary activities against internal skills and competencies, to see to what extent there is a cross-over (for example, for staff who mentor business studies students). However, the comment was made in interview that care must be taken over this mapping process, as the company does not want to give the impression that activities undertaken by staff in their own time will automatically lead to career enhancement.

Cadbury Schweppes also views voluntary work activities as part of personal development; staff are encouraged to discuss this with their managers if they are seeking to do volunteering during work hours. For example, it is recognised by the company that if someone gains experience of speaking to a classroom of children, this will clearly help with their development of presentation skills.¹³

Severn Trent's quarterly newsletter on community involvement, *Step>Forward*, points to the part that volunteering can play in enhancing staff morale and motivation. In the Summer 2002 edition a short interview was conducted with Martin Kane, the Head of Networks in Severn Trent Water. When asked if he was worried that volunteering would take up too much of employees' time, his response was:

¹² Available from www.scottishpower.com/pages/aboutus_community.

¹³ Tuffrey (1995) looks at how various forms of volunteering can be structured to match certain competences.

Experience has shown that our staff who have returned from employee volunteering projects come back into the business committed and motivated, which more than justifies their time away from the 'day job'. Severn Trent (2002:4) *Step>forward* newsletter.¹⁴

British Airways employees are involved in a range of voluntary activities. Additionally, the company arranges team-building exercises in the form of projects that can benefit the local community. These have involved, for example, staff decorating a classroom in a local school.

Alliance and Leicester's internal document on employee volunteering document highlights the range of inter-linked benefits associated with volunteering – for both the employer and employee (Example 6).

Example 6. Alliance and Leicester – Benefits of volunteering

Benefits to the company

- Demonstrates a change in culture of the organisation
- Enhances the company's customer service objectives
- Breaks down barriers between departments and encourages teamworking
- Promotes the company's image as a caring employer and an organisation that is involved in the communities in which it operates
- Affords a structured programme for positive involvement by employees in the community in which the company operates
- Reinforces company and brand loyalty
- Complements the company's existing charitable donations
- Responds to requests from institutional shareholders as to the level of the company's corporate engagement in the community

Benefits to the employee

- Adds a 'real life' dimension to existing training and development
- Emphasis on 'working together' improves team performance and breaks down departmental 'silo' mentality
- Can gain management experience
- The 'service ethic' of volunteering will strengthen the company's service objectives
- Encourages innovation
- Encourages recruitment of new staff
- For those nearing retirement, it can revitalise their skills

Source: Alliance and Leicester internal policy document, 2002.

Employee participation in the Special Constabulary

A small number of companies contacted for this study have specific policy provision for employee participation in the Special Constabulary. These include Abbey National, as noted above. British Airways allow up to one week paid leave per year for employees to carry out their duties as a Special Constables. Friends Provident have similar provision. When interviewed, their Community Relations Manager said he was aware of two employees in the

¹⁴ Available from www.severntrent.co.uk.

company who are Police Specials, and are allowed an extra ten days paid leave a year to undertake policing duties.

In some other cases interviewees mentioned that they personally know of colleagues who work as Special Constables, but that there are no formal leave arrangements in place. If time from work is required this will have to be negotiated with line-managers. An HR officer at the Royal Bank of Scotland commented that the bank ‘actively encourages’ staff who are Special Constables and intends to extend its leave policy in order explicitly to include Specials.

Some company representatives interviewed have had no experience of staff interest in the Special Constabulary. Despite this, after consideration they indicated that their companies would look favourably on an employee who joined the Specials and would be prepared to be flexible regarding working arrangements.

In certain cases, while there is no specific provision for volunteering as Police Specials, community safety is mentioned as one aspect of broader CSR objectives. For example, Lattice Group provides funding for victim support training. They have also funded personalised safety education books for distribution to primary-aged pupils, showing them how to ‘play safe, stay safe and keep safe’.¹⁵ Another example is Legal and General which supports Crime Concern and is currently funding a Crime Concern youth inclusion project in Cardiff.¹⁶ Marks and Spencer have a specific CSR policy on improving community involvement and improving safety. Again, this primarily focuses on charitable contributions (see Example 7).

Example 7. Marks and Spencer Community Involvement – Investing in safety

‘We are committed to providing a safer environment for our customers, our employees and the community. We want to see safer cities, streets and rural communities so that we can all live and work in an environment free from fear. We continue to address all retail crime, and search for ways in which our own shopping environments can become safer places. To work towards this, we support initiatives that deal with the causes of crime, especially those that:

- Support projects that deal with the problems associated with the misuse of drugs and other addictive substances
- Provide young people at risk with meaningful activities to deter them from becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Support initiatives that tackle the problems of homeless people
- Support projects that concentrate on community safety’

As well as supporting ‘key’ charitable agencies, the company hopes to encourage ‘...people from different areas of [their] business to get involved in safety projects’. For this the company hopes to involve both employees and suppliers where possible.

Source: Marks and Spencer policy document ‘Community involvement – Investing in safety’. Available from www.marksandspencer.com.

¹⁵ www.lattice-foundation.com.

¹⁶ www.legal-and-general.co.uk/newcorporate/crimeconcern.

The general conclusion to be reached from the available evidence on employee volunteering for the Special Constabulary is that this is an area that is rarely prioritised in volunteering policies. However, it is clear also that many companies are open to the idea of involvement. For some, such as Marks and Spencer, Lattice and Legal and General, this will be a simple extension of existing interest in community safety. For others it might involve a rethinking of their current CSR priorities.

3. Conclusions: Opportunities for the Special Constabulary

As noted in the introduction to this paper, the first aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of large employers in the private sector to staff participation in voluntary work. The second aim of the research was to look more specifically at whether employers have provisions for or actively encourage staff involvement in the Special Constabulary.

This concluding section of the report addresses the third aim: that is, it explores opportunities for the Special Constabulary to build on existing interest, on the part of large employers, in employee volunteering. There are five main issues to consider here:

- The favourable environment for employee volunteering;
- Encouraging the prioritisation of community safety within CSR goals;
- The Special Constabulary and transferable skills;
- The use of brokers for employee volunteering; and
- Flexibility and diversity in workplace practices.

A favourable environment for employee volunteering

The findings of the review of employer policies on volunteering clearly demonstrate that volunteering is accorded a high priority within many large companies. Of the 40 companies from which information was forthcoming, two-thirds permit volunteering during company time, and not one discourages volunteering. It is evident also that volunteering is often viewed as a core component of wider CSR policies. As such, employee volunteering is often co-ordinated or promoted by company departments which are dedicated to CSR or 'community investment' activities.

There is, in other words, currently a favourable climate for staff participation in voluntary work. If the Special Constabulary want to extend recruitment through employer support, they could be 'pushing at an open door'.

It is notable, moreover, that several companies are currently in the process of drafting or refining CSR policies. For example, the GUS retail and business services group produced its first ever CSR report in March 2002. In this report the company's Group Chief Executive identified that, while company interest in its employees and neighbours is not new, grouping these activities ensures it gets the Board's attention:

...many elements of CSR are not new. Most companies have a professional approach to managing people and have long since recognised that well-motivated employees are good for business. Most, too, appreciate the value of being actively involved with the communities in which they operate. By bringing all these aspects together under the one heading, CSR has taken on a scale and an importance that ensures it a place on the Board agenda. (GUS Group Chief Executive John Peace, in GUS, 2002, *Corporate Social Responsibility Report, March 2002*¹⁷)

Specific policies on employee volunteering are, likewise, currently being revised in a number of companies. These include Diageo, which has wide-ranging interests in volunteering and

¹⁷ Available from www.gusplc.co.uk.

charitable activities, and is in the process of drawing up a volunteering policy which is intended to raise the profile of employees' involvement in voluntary work.

Prioritising community safety

Special Constabulary recruitment would undoubtedly benefit from a greater prioritisation of the theme of community safety within CSR policies. As is discussed earlier, in a small number of the companies reviewed for this study (for example, Lattice Group and Legal and General), issues relating to community safety are included in CSR work. Other areas, such as education and the environment, tend to be much more strongly emphasised.

It is possible that community safety is frequently overlooked as a potential CSR goal, not only because there is such a strong interest in other social issues, but also because the theme of community safety can be viewed in somewhat narrow and negative terms: that is, as solely a matter of crime and crime reduction. If a company's understanding of community safety can be extended to such wider issues as fostering healthy communities, reducing levels of anti-social behaviour, and improving quality of life, this would link it more closely with other community-related CSR objectives. Prioritisation of community safety in this broader sense would mesh with current ministerial interest in promoting public reassurance and reducing fear of crime through greater use of Special Constables, Community Support Officers (CSOs) and local wardens, all of whom are regarded as members of the 'extended police family'.¹⁸ Moreover, a broader perspective on community safety allows for connections to be made to youth related activities that are seen as helping to divert young people from crime.

Support for the Special Constabulary could easily slot within, or build on, employers' general commitment to community safety. However, it should be noted that an interest in the Special Constabulary does not necessarily follow from an emphasis on community safety. For example, despite Marks and Spencer's 'investing in safety' programme (see Example 7), participation in the Special Constabulary is not spelled out as a priority.

It is noted above that some companies provide a 'menu' of specific volunteering opportunities for interested employees. Whether or not a company prioritises community safety, the Special Constabulary should be alert to the possibility of inclusion in any such 'menu', and be proactive in making itself known to employers.

Provisions for employees who work as Special Constables may be offered not so much under the heading of community-based voluntary work but, alternatively, as part of a volunteering policy on 'public service'. An example of this is provided by Abbey National (Example 1). This provides another perspective from which the Special Constabulary can encourage employer support.

The Special Constabulary and transferable skills

Many of the companies contacted for this research recognise that the kinds of skills and competencies that employees gain through voluntary work can play an important part in the

¹⁸ The National Policing Plan (Home Office, 2002b:10) states that: "Chief officers should make full use of officers, Special Constables, CSOs and other members of the extended police family as part of the force's response to anti-social behaviour".

workplace. While voluntary activities may entail work of a very different kind or in a different context to that carried out in the company, it may contribute to personal development in a range of ways. This may involve the development of specific skills (such as marketing, presentation and business planning) as well as 'softer' skills (such as assertiveness, team-working abilities and initiative).

It is clear that the varied experiences and skills gained through involvement in the Special Constabulary can benefit both the employee and, ultimately, the employer. According to the Special Constabulary recruitment page of the UK Police website, people who volunteer as Special Constables can undertake a wide range of activities:

[Experiences] ...might vary from helping with traffic control at the scene of an accident; restoring order and arresting offenders during a fracas on the street; or searching for a missing child ... [as part of] helping the local regular police in their everyday duties.¹⁹

The more that the Special Constabulary considers how the skills and general competencies acquired by Special Constables can be matched to or fit in with the expectations of employers, the greater their opportunity will be to promote employer support for recruitment.

Brokers for employee volunteering

Several large companies organise their employee volunteering through a broker – that is, a partnership organisation that co-ordinates and facilitates the work. This is the case, for example, for Prudential, which finds that the main advantage of using a broker is that they can deal with just one contact point that provides information on a wide range of schemes. For Prudential, most community work is focused on education, although brokers deal with all types of voluntary work.

The government, via the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Home Office's Active Community Unit and the DTI Phoenix Fund, has funded a business broker programme run by Business in the Community (BITC) in partnership with the British Chamber of Commerce.²⁰ Nine pilot schemes have been run with brokers employed '...to support and encourage companies to work with their local communities to tackle deprivation and boost local economies'. According to the BITC website, brokers have two main jobs:

1. They are boosting input to Local Strategic Partnerships, ...[to] bring together public services, business and voluntary and community groups to improve local areas.
2. They are matching business interest with community needs to deliver Neighbourhood Renewal, the strategy to regenerate deprived areas.

The above two objectives can both encompass the work of the Special Constabulary. In fact, BITC, through their 'Capital Cares' programme, have already planned work in the community safety field. A 'Capital Cares Community Safety Action Week' is scheduled to run from 7 to 14 March 2003, aiming to improve the quality and impact of employee volunteering throughout Greater London.

¹⁹ www.ukpolice.org.uk/public/special_recruit.

²⁰ See www.bitc.org.uk/programmes

Davis Smith and Rankin's (1999) development of an employer-supported volunteering (ESV) model, which made use of brokers to promote Special Constable recruitment, produced a number of conclusions about how to maximise the effectiveness of this approach. The ESV pilot used both internal brokers (including a Special Constable and retired police officer) and external brokers (including BITC and a business consultant). Davis Smith and Rankin argue that whether an internal or external broker is used:

The most important quality that is needed is the ability to present an initial case to the employer which makes clear that all parties will benefit from the partnership. A broker therefore needs to be confident, have good presentational skills and be well briefed on the benefits that are available in return for employer support (Davis Smith and Rankin, 1999: 31).

Flexibility and diversity

Employers in Britain – both in the private and public sectors – are today facing increasing pressures to allow flexible working practices. More and more employees are demanding working conditions that permit a satisfactory 'work-life balance'. For their part, employers are responding to these demands and to legislative changes on working practices, and many are aware that the motivation and morale of staff may be enhanced if they are offered greater flexibility.

Company policies on employee volunteering should be seen in the context of these trends. When companies make provisions for volunteering, just as much as when they permit flexible working to take account of family and other responsibilities, they are recognising that work commitments cannot be carried out at the cost of all other aspects of life. Indeed, these wider issues relating to flexible working and the 'work-life balance' are often incorporated within CSR goals.

Although these concerns are generally an underlying or implicit feature of employee volunteering policies, rather than a core component, they should nevertheless be reflected in programmes devised by the Special Constabulary with a view to attracting employer support.

It is also crucial that, in seeking to raise their profile among employers, the Special Constabulary takes account of the great diversity in company policies. There is diversity not only in areas of interest within CSR goals, but also in the extent to which volunteering is formalised in company policy and is favoured over other forms of charitable involvement. Furthermore, some companies face practical constraints in releasing staff for voluntary work that are not necessarily a concern for others.²¹ This indicates that campaigns for employer support should not be uniform, but should be tailored to the particular interests and circumstances of the companies involved. Brokers can, of course, play an important part in this.

²¹ The issue of constraints on releasing volunteering has not been examined in detail by this study, as it relates more to the day-to-day management of personnel than to the formulation of company-wide policies and approaches. However, a Community Affairs Manager with Bradford and Bingley, interviewed for this study, commented that staff in the company's branches – who make up the large majority of employees – cannot do volunteering in work hours as this would leave the branches short of staff.

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